

## Article

# Sites of learning: Exploring political ecologies and visceral pedagogies of surplus food redistribution in the UK

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## Sites of learning: exploring political ecologies and visceral pedagogies of surplus food redistribution in the UK

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Abstract:	<p>Drawing on ethnographic research with organisations redistributing food waste, this paper explores potentials for political and ethical learning by comparing different approaches to food handling and teaching. Food acts as instigator and tool for learning about ecological impacts, wellbeing, food journeys, health, and pleasure. Re-learning wasted food challenges accusations of its stigmatising potential while attempting to address serious material issues of food insecurity and community food access. Taking seriously the charge that 'community-level' approaches might depoliticise and individualise food distribution at the expense of structural critique and action, these pragmatic and polysemic enrolments of food waste can nevertheless embody a teleology of change, through changing practices of food handling and fostering critical understandings of food system issues. While acknowledging the spatial, temporal and technological mediators of foodstuff's journey between bin and mouth, attention is paid to the sensorial, embodied, and affective means by which the food/waste distinction is known and taught/learned. A 'political ecology of the body' framework is used to explore the 'visceral realm' of food access as always situated in learners' diverse former experiences. These visceral pedagogies of knowing food sit alongside the power dynamics of regulatory food governance in the form of, for example, expiry-date labels. In short, these practices, albeit rooted in environmentally damaging and unequally-distributed foodscapes requiring systemic transformation, can nevertheless foster more vibrant sympathies between people and food, more care-ful connections between learners and their food futures.</p>

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**Abstract**

Drawing on ethnographic research with organisations redistributing wasted food, this paper explores potentials for political and ethical learning by comparing different approaches to food handling and teaching. Food acts as instigator and tool for learning about ecological impacts, wellbeing, provenance, health, and pleasure. Re-learning wasted food challenges accusations of its stigmatising potential while attempting to address serious material issues of food insecurity and community food access. Taking seriously the charge that ‘community-level’ approaches might depoliticise and individualise food distribution at the expense of structural critique and action, these pragmatic and polysemic enrolments of food waste can nevertheless embody a teleology of change, through changing practices of food handling and fostering critical understandings of food system issues. While acknowledging the spatial, temporal and technological mediators of food’s journey from bin towards mouth, attention is paid to the sensorial, embodied, and affective means by which the food/waste distinction is known and taught/learned. A ‘political ecology of the body’ framework is used to explore the ‘visceral realm’ of food access as always part-situated in learners’ diverse foodscapes. These visceral pedagogies of knowing food sit alongside the power dynamics of regulatory food governance in the form of, for example, expiry-date labels. In short, these practices, albeit rooted in environmentally damaging and unequally-distributed foodscapes requiring systemic transformation, can nevertheless foster more vibrant sympathies between people and food, more careful connections between learners and their food futures.

**Keywords: food waste; food insecurity; food access; surplus food redistribution; visceral pedagogies; political ecology of the body**

The growing prevalence of schemes to intercept and redistribute food wasted by producers and retailers has responded to, and further problematised, not only the extent of food wastage in wealthy food economies, but also the uneven distribution of

wealth and food access manifest in growing evidence of ‘household food insecurity’ (Midgley, 2013). Attention to food insecurity in UK media, civil society organisation (CSO) and policy discourse has renewed concerns over its prevalence in schools e.g. All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food (2015). As charitable food banking in the UK has expanded, CSOs and community groups have increased provision of holiday-period food assistance. Additionally, the growth of school breakfast provision suggests schools’ widening role in children’s foodways. This paper highlights ambiguous implications of a food waste activism network’s school food programme. Its pedagogical practices raise questions around a two-fold concern. Firstly, the role of community organisations in responding to systemic problems; namely food insecurity and food wastage. Do locally-grounded charitable and activist responses to food inequalities risk depoliticising or deflecting structural causes and solutions? Secondly, ‘surplus food redistribution’ in schools raises questions about children’s responsibilities over their own food choices. How does the summoning and cultivation of childrens’ embodied and sensory capacities to know food differently affect, on the one hand, their health and food access and, on the other, their responsabilisation for systemic issues lying beyond their control? Through the framework of a ‘political ecology of the body’ (Hayes-Conroy, 2015), and specifically the notion of ‘visceral access’, binary notions assumed by these questions will be challenged: ‘charity v activist’ frames of surplus food redistribution, and ‘agency v structure’ binaries assumed by the question of whether food waste pedagogies empower or responsabilise young people (the verbal form ‘wasted’ rather than ‘surplus’ food is adopted, conveying human-induced processes by which food is rendered waste). These questions will be explored through two empirical cases; primarily, a school programme using wasted food intercepted by a network of redistribution activists, and a charity that redistributes food similarly to a US-style foodbank. First, literature considering the political implications of food provision and pedagogies in schools are explored.

## **Knowing food as more-than-food**

Food is an ontologically-multiple medium for learning about the politics and ethics of food systems. Biltekoff (2016) analyses ‘framing contests’ at play in the design of school curricula by food activist and food industry bodies. These aim to shape “different kinds of consumers” but also to “stabilize different versions of what food

is” (2016:55). Biltekoff compares polarised articulations of processed food, where ‘Real Food’ (a discussion guide by sustainable food activists) frames food as “connections across natural and social systems” (2016:53), while ‘Real Facts’ (a food trade association’s education materials) frames food not as systemic and political but ontologically ‘singular’: a commodity delivering consumer needs and producer profits. Biltekoff distinguishes ontologies of health inhering in the curricula: Real Food “decentres the individual” and highlights issues of “access and policy” (2016:52-3), while Real Facts’ “anti-politics of health...frames and enables health as the result of individual biology, personal responsibility, and information” (2016:54). Advocating dialogic research that recognises food system problems and solutions as technical *and* social, her analysis reveals how food pedagogies differently construe, responsabilise and/or empower children and their foodscapes. The following section introduces another approach to understanding foodscapes as ontologically multiple.

### **Political ecology of the body**

Hayes-Conroy’s (2015) political ecology of the body (PEB) framework encompasses analytical attention to structural, discursive and material dimensions of health and wellbeing. Its hybrid foci mirror shifts in political ecological thought from situating ecological struggle within political economic constraints towards embracing post-humanism (Heynen, 2013). PEB builds on feminist critiques of social constructivism in highlighting affect, materiality, embodiment, emotion, performativity and non-representational methodologies for grasping life-as-lived. Bodies and eating offer vantage points for understanding food as the material grounds of survival, structural enabler and constraints of this, and discursive practices mediating food access at multiple scales. Considered through a PEB lens, everyday work of food redistribution involves agentic encounters with food items, ideas about that food and more or less explicit engagement with structures that both enable and constrain practices.

### **Visceral food access**

Hayes-Conroy (2017:51) writes that theoretical attention to ‘the visceral realm’ seeks to understand political agency “from the body out”. By ‘visceral’ she denotes the “state/feeling of bodies in interrelation with environments/space”. As a specifically political pursuit, we must not only ‘follow’ bodies but also “experiences of social position(ing), norms and difference”. This includes methodological reflexivity in

research praxis, including attending to race, class and gender. Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2013) apply the framework to school cooking-and-gardening programmes. They acknowledge diverse “visceral topographies” that individual learners bring to learning encounters. Bringing students into relation with new foods and ideas can “widen the scope of emotional possibilities” (2013:84) and (re)shape material sensitivities, identities and relationships available to them. However, learners’ different backgrounds and experiences may engender frustration or resentment towards programme interventions: hoped-for outcomes depend on contingent and haphazard encounters between teachers, learners and more-than-human mediators. The authors’ notion of ‘visceral access’ acknowledges bodily senses and motivations as micro-spaces of encounter. Children’s “specific bodily histories and prior and current affective/emotional relations with alternative foods” (2013:82) come into being with embodied sensations of food handling and eating to (re)shape visceral access, body-food relationships and encounters whose consequences can stretch beyond the classroom.

PEB’s attention to children’s life-assemblages highlights school as just one node in ‘foodscapes’ (Brembeck et al., 2013) and the importance of recognising food choice as a more-than-individual matter comprising families, homes, shops and sensory experience. This takes us beyond the precepts of ‘sensory education’, which aims to teach children to eat healthily through making novel/healthy foods sensorily familiar e.g. Reverdy (2011). By critiquing socio-environmental change premised solely on ‘attitudes, behaviours and choices’ of individuals (Shove, 2010), PEB can attend to micro-level food-body assemblages as well as how food redistribution organisations address, or neglect, broader issues of political responsibility for hunger and waste. I now turn to consider political modalities of such redistribution.

#### **Community feeding programmes: revolutionary possibilities?**

Ethnographies of wasted food redistribution, and community feeding programmes more broadly, reveal its complex ethico-political implications, often relying upon a binary distinction between activism and charity. Heynen (2010) contrasts the political containment functions of charitable food with radical forms of food redistribution that, historically, have contested uneven “geographies of survival”.

Patel (2011) analyses conditions transforming food assistance from ‘pacifying to revolutionary’ in the Black Panther Party (BPP)’s politics of the everyday. The BPP exemplifies political possibilities in everyday, material mechanisms of social reproduction, including community food programmes. Its ‘Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren’ programme was launched in 1968, feeding thousands of children across America at its peak (Heynen, 2009). It addressed corporeal realities of uneven urban food access given state failures to meet basic biophysical needs of African-Americans. Importantly, such ‘survival programmes’ were explicitly recognised as “not solutions to our problems”, but to nourish “survival pending revolution” (Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008:4). Grounding politics in everyday bodily survival and creating spaces/relationships of mutual aid, Heynen argues, was necessary for broader solidarities to emerge. Neighbourhood care networks could extend to national-global assemblages of solidarity, stretching the concept of ‘community’. This challenges binary interpretations of whether ‘community-level’ praxis enables or constrains systemic political change at multiple scales.

Patel (2011:122-3) distinguishes the BPP’s “vision for social change” from charity:

By bursting the idea of food as...charity bestowed by rich to poor, setting in its place the notion that food is a right- and...that an order might be composed without private property- the act of feeding children was transformed from pacifying to revolutionary (p.25)

This transformation is rooted in nurturing material geographies of everyday survival and, Heynen (2009) argues, challenging the patriarchal dissociation of revolutionary praxis from domesticity and care. The BPP’s breakfast programme appears in dialectical light, where food nurtured bodies, ideas and communal spaces as a necessary (if insufficient) vehicle of broader systemic transformation that nevertheless instigated considerable structural change. Pressure on Hoover’s government as a result of BPP activism led to the breakfast programme’s co-optation in the rollout of federally-funded school breakfast programmes (Patel 2011). Such articulations of practical action and political organising suggest counter-possibilities for community food programmes to engender multi-level change, for bottom-up organising to foster systemic change, albeit in unpredictable ways. While operating in a different context, UK schools are increasingly recognising impacts of food insecurity among families on young peoples’ learning (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). Where state entitlements have declined, living costs have risen and employment does not



164 necessarily protect against poverty. In this context, can wasted food redistribution,  
 165 and the politics it generates, foster systemic change while addressing bodily needs?  
 166 Debates are underway in the UK as to the kind of solution ‘surplus food  
 167 redistribution’ offers as a response to hunger and/or food waste, and its distribution of  
 168 benefits (Caraher & Furey, 2017). The following section explores redistribution as  
 169 contesting commodification as a vector of edible food’s unnecessary wastage.

### 170 **Eating waste as affective activism**

171 Critical food waste scholarship analyses the commodification of food’s cosmetic  
 172 qualities as an aspect of systematic wastage. Commodification facilitates wastage if  
 173 foodstuffs’ exchange value is not realised. Giles (2016) analyses “postcard-perfect”  
 174 rows of produce in Seattle’s Pike Place market as “meta-signifiers” of world-class  
 175 consumption, exuding an “anthropocentric cosmopolitanism, diametrically opposed to  
 176 the contingency of a natural world which resists the ontological standardisation of  
 177 form and function inherent in the commodity” (Giles 2016:84). Theories of affective  
 178 politics, such as Thrift (2004) on “the manipulation of affect for political ends”, can  
 179 help to account for wasted food’s materiality, including the moral discomfort and  
 180 visceral feelings its presence often prompts. What matters in food’s aesthetic  
 181 fetishisation is not the capacity of food-commodities to nourish bodies and uphold  
 182 subsistence rights, but the logics of capital accumulation, premised on the routine  
 183 expulsion of ‘ex-commodities’ (Barnard, 2016). Understanding food’s wastage for  
 184 commercial reasons regardless of its edibility leads social movement activists to  
 185 acknowledge, articulate, and challenge this logic, demonstrating use values by eating  
 186 recovered food and bequeathing it an alternative biopolitical trajectory from its  
 187 commodity form.

188 Barnard notes the conflation between waste’s symbolism and its visceral capacities,  
 189 arguing that “we are now frequently disgusted by anything labelled ‘waste’”  
 190 (2016:129). For ‘freegans’ in his study, eating ‘polluted’ food attempts to  
 191 symbolically “flip the object of disgust onto the companies that created ex-  
 192 commodities in the first place” (ibid.). Freegans refracted the ‘dirt’ of wasted food by  
 193 visually displaying ‘dumpster-dived’ foods on sidewalks with speeches decrying the  
 194 capitalist logics and socio-ecological harm represented by food wastage to passers-by.  
 195 Patel (2011) notes how the BPP obtained breakfast programme foods from the San



196 Francisco Diggers, whose redistribution of wasted food as free public meals  
 197 constituted a prefigurative politics of demonstrating alternatives to capitalism. The  
 198 BPP framed their reliance on donated food as a way for businesses to express  
 199 community care. They envisaged businesses lowering their prices given their analysis  
 200 of capitalist “robbery”, the “ridiculously high prices that we must pay for food, which  
 201 is necessary for our daily sustenance” (Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008:39).  
 202 Contrastingly, Barnard and Mourad (2014) explore how superficially similar acts of  
 203 redistributing surplus food can enact divergent political repertoires that may or may  
 204 not be understood/shared by eaters. Food’s politicised redistribution bears a long  
 205 history; activists’ analyses of its commodification and material possibilities suggest  
 206 discursive repertoires that can be compared with the empirical cases explored in this  
 207 paper.

## 208 **Reconfiguring the senses**

209 Theorising the activism of Food Not Bombs, Giles argues that food commodities’  
 210 “material agency” as ripening or bruising amounts to corrupting trajectories towards  
 211 “matter out of place” that renders food (commercially) waste (2016:84). Barnard  
 212 notes the dominance of the visual in determining food’s status:

213       The fetishism of waste partly comes through our overreliance on sight and  
 214       misconceptions about hygiene; by adopting new practices and norms, freegans  
 215       were prefiguring a “post-fetish” world (2016:130)

216 For activists, food recovery means more than material survival, enacting “direct  
 217 action that challenged the power of retailers to determine what was, and was not,  
 218 good to eat” (Barnard 2016:127). This prompts us to consider *who and what else*  
 219 might have the power to determine what is good to eat, and how. Wasted food’s  
 220 structural, representational and material qualities can be re-configured through  
 221 practice, and it is practices of food acquisition, handling and teaching that will be  
 222 considered in relation to the school programme’s politics.

223 Here we see opportunities for a PEB analysis of food redistribution practices,  
 224 considering multi-bodied affect as well as the politics of representation and  
 225 knowledge-production around food/eating. Structural forces of different natures and  
 226 scales are acknowledged, for example the role of regulation. US reluctance to  
 227 legislate for standardised expiry-dates, Barnard argues (2016:127), reflects corporate  
 228 interests, which “make more money when consumers don’t trust their senses and

229 throw out food that has passed a conservative sell-by date”. For freegans, challenging  
 230 expiry-dates and commercial cosmetic standards to distinguish food from waste  
 231 involves the cultivation of embodied discernment of food via the senses. The  
 232 embodied knowledge politics through which edibility is conferred by engaging  
 233 sensorily with food thus serve as a means to critique government inaction and  
 234 corporate greed.

### 235 **Food safety as praxis**

236 Barnard notes that freegans, ironically, actually know little about where their food  
 237 comes from and that food may have been wasted because it is unsafe, such as product  
 238 recalls (Barnard, 2016:128). Food’s potential to make people ill constitutes valid  
 239 anxiety that can hasten food’s categorisation as waste in homes (Evans, 2014:47).  
 240 Freegans’ risk-minimisation strategies included careful procedures for washing,  
 241 preparing and cooking food. One way to compare the politics of food redistribution is  
 242 thus to examine how different redistributors negotiate ideas, devices and practices for  
 243 determining wasted food’s suitability for feeding to people. Rather than objectively  
 244 judge food as ‘safe’ and ‘edible’, the task here is to analyse redistributors’ mediations  
 245 for knowing good food, and for teaching this to others, which will be later analysed in  
 246 challenging binary distinctions between redistribution-as-activism and redistribution-  
 247 as-charity. The next section examines literature critiquing the latter.

### 248 **Charitable food redistribution**

249 Unlike activists’ de-fetishisation efforts, wasted food provides a vehicle for ‘doing  
 250 good’ by charitable organisations, not primarily to critique causes of food wastage,  
 251 but to feed food-insecure people. North American literature suggests important  
 252 distinctions between transient, subcultural redistribution by social movements as  
 253 described above, and institutionalised charitable redistribution. Poppendieck (1998)  
 254 roots the latter in chaotic origins of utilising food surpluses to provide a temporary  
 255 solution to the poverty wrought by Reaganomics. This expanded to become highly-  
 256 resourced, integrated and professionalised foodbanking networks. These, she argues,  
 257 oversimplify and depoliticise poverty through “cosmetic solutions”, redefining the  
 258 retrenchment of public entitlement as individualised hunger that can be solved by  
 259 gifts of food (1998:315).

UK debates around responsibilities of government, charity and corporations in addressing poverty through food redistribution have intensified since the onset of post-recessionary austerity Conservative Party policy-making in 2010 (Midgley, 2013). Critics have questioned the quality and appropriateness of charitable food (Caraher & Furey, 2017). Power imbalances implied by Patel's description of charity as 'pacification' have been analysed in terms of stigma, shame and powerlessness (van der Horst et al., 2014). While uneven emotional and affective dynamics of food aid encounters have been explored (Williams et al., 2016), less attention has been paid to the visceral realm of wasted charitable food. Critics have, however, shed light on the qualities of donated and wasted food; Tarasuk and Eakin (2005) noted the "limited and highly variable supply of food donations" as a limiting factor of foodbank provision. Van der Horst et al. (2014:1512) note that for some recipients the "experience of poverty is heightened by the content of the food parcels", including regular inclusion of "spoiled food" where expiration dates prompted emotional responses to "embodied taboos" around eating 'waste'. Recipients were expected to "overcome...inhibitions" (ibid.) through volunteers educating them about the relevance of expiration dates. This contrasts with the discursive refraction by which freegan activists re-framed food as edible and desirable by challenging 'embodied taboos' around expiry-dates as regulatory constructions, not as flawed individual knowledge.

### **Political food ecologies: challenging the activist/charity binary**

Before turning to our methodology, we bring together some of the strands laid out in identifying a nexus of food politics, ethics and pedagogy that blur the distinction between pacifying and revolutionary. The PEB framework critiques efforts to teach 'ethical' food to students whose classed, racialised and gendered 'visceral topographies' may be obscured by pedagogical programmes that aim to broaden learners' foodscapes without acknowledging the structural, representational and material constraints affecting all teaching and learning (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Critiques of the individualising propensities of charitable redistribution (Poppendieck 1998) can nevertheless be applied to more radical redistribution practices. While 'dumpster diving' for some provides a means to disavow waste resulting from strict cosmetic standards, conservative expiry dates and abundantly-stocked shop shelves, its positing of individual practice in pursuit of more

293 ethical forms of consumption arguably misses the “extent to which these practices are  
294 constrained by the existing organization of food production, distribution and  
295 consumption” (Mourad & Barnard, 2016).

296 The PEB framework, however, embraces the interactions of the structural, discursive  
297 and material operations of power and we consider political activity at multiple levels,  
298 rather than analyse all consumption-focussed activity as embodying neoliberal  
299 strategy. We will thus explore different ways that redistribution organisations  
300 configure food qualities, especially safety and edibility, and their political  
301 implications. Exploring differences between organisations’ more-than-human  
302 assembling of food ethics is an attempt to identify spaces for debate around a key  
303 question for food justice: how should we regard/utilise wasted food?

304 As suggested, actors utilise wasted food for different ends, using diverse practical and  
305 discursive means for representing and handling food/waste, which translate into  
306 distinctive pedagogies of ‘knowing food’ that can then be taught to others. These  
307 range from activists’ performances revealing the extent and mundane capitalist logics  
308 of food wastage to expanding charitable movements framing wasted food as a  
309 resource for addressing poverty. While reflecting distinct political repertoires, they do  
310 however overlap and converge in important ways: their reliance on donated food, and  
311 their enabling of food access through re-diverting flows of de commodified food. The  
312 everyday work of redistribution involves agentic encounters with food items, ideas  
313 about that food and more or less explicit engagement with structures that both enable  
314 and constrain practices. Patel (2011:129), however, argues that the difference between  
315 ‘pacification’ and ‘revolution’ lies in the recognition that food provision is not enough  
316 to transform food injustices, which requires envisaging and acting upon the scale of  
317 injustice through “political education and effective action”. He also notes the  
318 importance of grappling with gender, race and other intersectional vectors of  
319 inequality in the pursuit of radical change. Might UK food redistribution offer a  
320 politics of empowerment, solidarity and critique rather than pacification, the  
321 disciplinary function served by charities in the neoliberal rollback of redistributive  
322 policy (Poppendieck, 1998)?

323 In conjunction with theory laid out, our empirics will challenge the activist/charity  
324 binary by highlighting differing redistribution organisations’ mutual concerns,

challenges and role in an expanding field of food aid. A focus on sensory praxis will draw out this challenged binary by examining pedagogies of teaching food/waste distinctions by two organisations, and by considering how organisations attempted to provide food that was appropriate, desirable, and safe.

## Methodology

Having situated our study in analyses of wasted food redistribution for diverse ends, we introduce the redistribution projects studied. The main focus is the school-educational programme of a network of pay-as-you-feel cafes serving wasted food. Its initial aim was to protest food waste's environmental hazards by demonstrating its extent and needlessness, but several participants also highlighted the network's role in bolstering food access in deprived neighbourhoods. Food is generally acquired through local businesses donating surplus food rather than bin-diving, though activists describe donations as 'interceptions' in a politics of refusal to acknowledge the beneficence of the food industry whose profit-motivated excess, they argue, *causes* wastage. Receiving donations also minimises risks of redistributing unsafe food, which Barnard (2016) notes is a risk of freegan practice.

The programme delivers wasted food to schools, which is subsequently redistributed to families through pay-as-you-feel market stalls manned by parents, teachers and/or children. It aims to alleviate school hunger (e.g. providing morning toast in classrooms) while raising awareness of food wastage. It was co-founded by a school in an area of high deprivation in a city in the north of England, described by the co-ordinator as a "desert" of access to both food and service provision. Organisers lead assemblies and classes to teach children about health, sustainability and entrepreneurship through handling wasted food. The programme also aims to contribute to the network's campaign strategy, "empowering" children to "feel like they have the power to be an activist", as one organiser described. Its aims thus go beyond providing inexpensive foods to families. Further, it hopes to instil changes in children's attitudes and skills around food that it is hoped will help them prevent food waste in their own and others' lives. Research, undertaken from 2015-2016, included a year of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten members of the pay-as-you-feel cafe network, including school programme organisers (referred to as 'activist-educators' below). Ethical and time considerations precluded interviewing

357 children/parents, so interviews aimed to capture organisers' experiences in relatively  
358 early stages of the programme.

359 The school programme's approach is compared with a national charity redistributing  
360 wasted food with the explicit aim of alleviating 'food poverty'. It redistributes food  
361 from major industry partner-donors to local charities through an expanding  
362 infrastructure of warehousing and transportation. It must adhere to the national  
363 charity's food-safety guidelines. Fieldwork took place over one year from November  
364 2015, with one regional depot.

365 Ethics approval for the research was granted by the university and informed consent  
366 granted by organisers and participants in all locations. Interviews were recorded,  
367 transcribed and analysed, drawing on tools of Critical Grounded Theory (Belfrage &  
368 Hauf, 2017) which facilitates attention to structural, discursive and relational/material  
369 dimensions. The two organisations' distinct origins, relationships with donors and  
370 modes of redistributing food offer ways to consider the political import of differing  
371 approaches to distinguishing food from waste through embodied praxis.

### 372 **School-based redistribution: depoliticising or meeting immediate needs?**

373 The first question to be addressed empirically is whether community-level food  
374 assistance depoliticises structural issues of poverty and waste. Heynen's (2009:408)  
375 reminder of the under-theorised mundane, "horrific reality of hunger" situates  
376 urban hunger "within the context of political economy, social reproduction, and  
377 poverty". Projects attending to this can thus provide not just vital sustenance but a  
378 window onto spatial and structural determinants of hunger. The activist network  
379 expressed attention to these, as shown below. Most pay-as-you-feel café network  
380 members differentiated themselves from charitable food aid providers, highlighting  
381 their primary purpose as campaigning against food waste. One characterised the  
382 redistribution charity's donor relationships as "so far up Tesco's arses that they'll  
383 never campaign to end food waste" (interview, café organiser, 19/1/16). She  
384 nevertheless described differences between cafés' emphases on addressing hunger  
385 locally, a point verified by other interviews, suggesting a mutual concern with the  
386 charity.

387 While the wider network tended to downplay its hunger relief role, the school  
388 programme (just one of the network's multiple conduits for redistributing surplus



food) cites alleviating in-school hunger as a primary aim. The founding school is located in area categorised as in the "bottom 2% of deprivation nationally" (Joe, school staff, interview 25/10/16). Joe described it as a "food desert", with the local supermarket 2.5 miles away. With most parents lacking a car, the £5 cost of taxis and buses to the shops meant less money to spend on healthier foods. The "medium of food", Joe suggested, was a means to engage parents in the school community, including its provision of English lessons, housing and welfare services. With over forty languages spoken by the school's families, he acknowledged multiple forms of deprivation affecting the school's refugee and asylum-seeking families. Joe's analyses reflect sensitivity of school staff to the structural determinants of hunger affecting pupils in their familial and geographical contexts. Staff have, alongside the activist network, advocated for income-based solutions by participating in national campaigns to address school-related hunger.

However, everyday activities raise questions about the appropriateness of surplus food market stalls, even if situated in broader political discourse. Food deliveries to schools are pre-sorted by volunteers of the café/activist network to ensure no high-risk food (bearing a 'use-by' date or needing refrigeration) is included. Schools receive a mixture of fruits/vegetables, bread/"cereal-type items" and "treats". While the network has secured enough donors to allow some predictability, and families are able to choose what to take, supplies are still dependent on available surpluses and can reflect the highly-processed, highly-packaged products one often encountered in redistribution spaces throughout the research. The 'market' is not intended to meet families' full food needs, and schools may use food internally for classroom learning or morning toast. While boosting food access, the stall nevertheless offers a partial and contingent source of food rather than fulfilling the human right to food, a challenge similarly levelled at charitable foodbanking (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005).

The pay-as-you-feel model of accessing food was noted in some interviews to be confusing and even frustrating for certain 'shoppers', prompting questions around the nuances of re-marketing food in school settings. Intended as a redistribution model that does not require referrals to foodbanks and is thus available to anybody, it nevertheless re-confers an exchange value onto food where the normative mode of paying is with money (rather than 'skills or time', which the organisation also invites as means of paying). In line with Barnard and Mourad's (2014) argument that food



422 waste activists' political repertoires may not be apparent to those receiving the food,  
 423 the market stall could become seen as just one more node in an expanding network of  
 424 charitable feeding. These points suggest the capacity of schools to bolster  
 425 communities' access to food and other services, but also the latent disciplinarity of  
 426 this extension of pastoral care to parents and the wider community. Engaging parents  
 427 in the job-searching, financial literacy and upskilling techniques of austerity  
 428 Workfare-style contemporary welfare through the 'medium of food' suggests a need  
 429 for critical attention to responsibilities of the state, through schools, in providing  
 430 welfare services. Little evidence appeared from initial interviews of a coordinated  
 431 political strategy that engaged families, schools and activists, without which Patel  
 432 (2011) suggests food distribution can remain 'pacifying', leaving structural  
 433 determinants of hunger/waste largely unchallenged.

434 How does the redistribution charity's model compare? First, it delivers food to a range  
 435 of organisations whose varied political work can be seen as "flying in under the  
 436 cover" of the charity, as Henderson (2004) skilfully argued of the articulations  
 437 between depoliticised charities and those they serve. Interviews revealed a diversity  
 438 of workers' beliefs about structural causes of hunger/waste, and motivations to  
 439 address these. Fundamentally, however, the charity's key priorities were upholding  
 440 donor relations, expanding infrastructure and regulatory compliance priorities, not  
 441 campaigning. While workers learned about problems including school hunger and  
 442 geographical deprivation through their articulations and engagements with recipients,  
 443 the charity's key remit remains alleviating need through food provision, not structural  
 444 change.

445 We now turn to examine the visceral pedagogies through which wasted food was  
 446 (re)configured through experiential learning, using the PEB framework to consider  
 447 such learning on the de/politicisation spectrum outlined in Biltekoff's (2016) analysis  
 448 of curricular design.

#### 449 **Viscerally learning food**

450 As noted, the 'curation' of schools' food deliveries at the redistribution network's  
 451 warehouses yields some consistency in type/quality and may prompt questioning  
 452 among children as to why visibly-edible food has been thrown away, and what might  
 453 be done with it. Pupils' receiving and re-sorting food for their market stall entails

visceral engagement with food. By handling and exploring its affective qualities, food's designation as 'waste' can thus be reconfigured. Food thus arrives at the school as ontologically plural, as not simply a commodity or nourishment, but the result of a systemic journey of wastage and recovery, as explained in tailored classes.

Activist-educator Tim designed lessons to challenge 'embodied taboos' around, for example, past-dated food. He described a pupil complaining that the food was "just manky bananas", so planned an initial lesson to

...remove anything that children would have already thought...like for example the manky banana comment; they think that it's just gonna be out-of-date food. (Tim, activist-educator, interview 26/10/17)

Playful tactility prompted disgust reactions:

I take a squishy banana, one that's slightly bruised...and get them to pass it around...it's like a hot potato, like urgh, urgh, and they want to pass it on as quickly as possible (Tim)

Disgust was then challenged through preparation practices, re-tooling the 'manky' banana by blending it into a smoothie for everyone to taste. Such touch-sight-taste reconfigurations provided visceral opportunities to (potentially) counter pre-conceptions. Contrasting effects of food on visual and gustatory receptors provide potential openings/blockages in the holistic assemblage that is motivation to try foods. These learning encounters create shared spaces for children's diverse 'visceral topographies' to be re-traced, perhaps challenging visual and haptic food judgements through food practices and tasting.

#### **Fostering 'healthy' connections with food**

Handling less-than-perfect foods was thus intended to widen children's affective repertoires with food. Educators aimed to foster bodily habits of engaging with food to be better able to discern, sense, and appreciate food's qualities: as edible, healthy, desirable. Fruits and vegetables were frequently mentioned as suited to sensory learning, suggesting the programme's alignment with dominant curricular concerns around 'healthy' eating. However, foods were re-contextualised as connective actants in food systems where 'health' emerges relationally rather than residing in individuals (Biltekoff, 2016). During an activity where children tried to place food in familiar categories, Nik re-positioned children's surprise at learning cucumbers as fruit within a narrative of food-plants' teleologies:

487 We talk about...actually what's a fruit for...if you understand [that] then you'll  
 488 understand why it's very nutritious 'cause the whole point of the fruit is to feed  
 489 the little seedling and so it's all about making those connections about actually,  
 490 this is not just something that you put in your mouth and it tastes a certain way,  
 491 it might grow a bit or whatever else; there's a whole lot more to it...(Nik)

492 Nik thus reframed fruit as more-than-food: a relational "material-semiotic actor"  
 493 (Haraway, 1988) whose 'job' is to do more than feed humans. Here, multi-sensory  
 494 engagement implied more than intensified sensory receptivity, by layering cognitive  
 495 knowledge *about* food with immediate sensation.

#### 496 **Co-creating knowledge?**

497 Biltekoff notes how the 'Real Food' curriculum cast pupils not as passive recipients of  
 498 knowledge but as co-creators of learning rooted in their broader foodscapes. While  
 499 Tim acknowledged children's preconceptions, activist-educator Nik framed children's  
 500 prior food knowledge as lacking: "before I go into the classroom, if you ask someone  
 501 where food comes from, it comes from a shelf in a shop and before that it becomes a  
 502 bit of a...dark grey hole". Learner-subject's 'grey holes' suggest blank slates for the  
 503 inscription of food systems knowledge. This masks somewhat the complexities of  
 504 children's prior ways of knowing food, perhaps the materiality of past shopping trips,  
 505 and partially obscures the co-constructive, contestable nature of learning given  
 506 children's diverse 'visceral topographies'. However, one organiser mentioned parents  
 507 being invited to food waste assemblies, suggesting attention to children's wider  
 508 foodscapes, and the relationships that populate them.

#### 509 **Sensing food/waste**

510 Foods' changing qualities as they degrade were instrumentalised to reconfigure  
 511 assumptions about food-as-waste using visual, olfactory and even auditory cues.  
 512 Children were encouraged to suggest how they might use different sense modalities to  
 513 determine whether food is "good to eat":

514 There'll usually be one person who knows about tapping a melon...every sense  
 515 will have a...relevant application to understanding whether the food is ripe or  
 516 rotten (Nik)

517 Mushrooms' "stink" prompted giggles, prompting Nik to recast disgust reactions  
 518 through re-framing the mushroom as a "fungal fruit". Yellowing broccoli was re-  
 519 framed as a "bunch of flowers" opening up. New ways of seeing, handling and

describing food were thus presented, aiming to widen children's acceptance of imperfect food as potential nourishment but also ecologically conscious consumption.

### **Situating food safety**

Activist-educators aimed to teach food safety as a contextual matter of interpreting regulatory determinants of waste. Improving expiry-date literacy has been an aim of government research and behaviour-change programmes around food waste (Lyndhurst, 2008). One organiser asked children to discuss their understanding of different expiry-dates:

What it does is create confusion, and that's probably the best word to describe how dates work on food in this country, confusion...(Tim, 26/10/2016)

After explaining differences between 'use-by' and 'best-before' expiry-dates (Milne 2012), children were encouraged to consider them in context:

We use the example...if there's two pieces of meat...one's been stored in the fridge, one's been out in the sun- they're both still within the use-by date- can you eat them both? (Tim)

He reported that most children would reply "yes", suggesting primacy of the expiry-date as a mode for interpreting edibility. He would tell them:

... 'no, you can't, because it hasn't been stored correctly, and actually you don't know how your food's been stored up to the point you get it'...we're really pushing that confidence and use of their senses as much as they can...(Tim)

Contextual re-presentation aimed to destabilise the expiry-date's authority and 'push' different kinds of confidence, by enacting sensorial, emotional and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

Food regulation has often followed crises of public trust in food systems following 'scandals' rooted in intensive production (Milne, 2012). Contra the scientific expertise congealed in expiry-dates, activists' beliefs that such technologies arbitrarily contribute to unnecessary waste prompted other kinds of knowing to take precedence in their pedagogies of knowing food:

...[sensory engagement]'s also an alternative way to understand when something's still good to eat- that if you don't want to look at that stupid date then what do you do then? (Nik)

Activist-educators did account for children's diverse prior knowledge. Nik suspected that children knowing precisely what different dates mean was "informed by a family having to do that [eat past-date foods] rather than having made the ethical choice but

554 informed by not really having that much money to spend”, while other children  
 555 expressed “overly strict behaviour around dates”. While describing expiry-dates as  
 556 ‘stupid’ expresses frustrated belief that they cause unnecessary waste, educators thus  
 557 recognised the limitations of individualising children’s behaviour given its rootedness  
 558 in their variable foodscapes and the ways thriftiness may well already figure highly in  
 559 families’ strategies to cope with food insecurity.

#### 560 **Charitable food: date-adherence as preserving dignity?**

561 How does the redistribution charity position food safety? It does not distribute past-  
 562 date food, reflecting concerns around donor compliance but also about the quality and  
 563 reputational implications of redistributed food. Following a briefing paper suggesting  
 564 the “inferior choice, accessibility and (nutritional) quality” of redistributed surplus  
 565 food (Caraher & Furey, 2017:13), the charity communicated via social media that it  
 566 distributes nutritious, in-date, desirable food. Staff frequently emphasised that it  
 567 delivered food to organisations cooking meals rather than giving food bags,  
 568 emphasising provision of commensal, familial, ‘proper’ food. Redistributing fresh  
 569 produce was described as a way to provide healthy-yet-compliant food, with loose  
 570 produce not requiring an expiry-date. This non-requirement lends space for more  
 571 contextual practice; warehouse manager Graham maximised the opportunities it  
 572 afforded for removing packaging. He argued that much produce comes in “its own  
 573 packaging” and can be sorted by its sensory qualities. He combined concern for  
 574 preserving recipients’ dignity by providing fresh, high-quality food with skills to  
 575 predict temporalities of fresh produce’s capacity to degrade:

576 [charity clients] don’t want fruit and veg sorted to a low standard...four days  
 577 later we finally get it to the customer and the next day...they open the  
 578 cupboard...and go “why have they given me a bag of mush?” It’s gotta be good  
 579 standards from the start, and it’s respect as well. You’re feeding people in need-  
 580 oh, here’s some rotten old crap for you...(Graham, interview, 14/11/2016)

581 The inferred ‘neediness’ of eventual food recipients was thus invoked in justifying  
 582 sorting practices that required volunteers to follow expiry-dates but also their  
 583 embodied skill in knowing food in its present and predicted future state. Unlike the  
 584 school programme, the charity model does not permit such close engagement  
 585 between redistributors, eventual eaters and the visceral affordances of food. However,  
 586 Graham and other food sorters’ care-ful praxis suggests that eventual eaters’ sensory

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experiences were indeed a concern that commanded volunteers' own embodied and sensory labours.

**Affective assemblages as politics?**

How might we analyse these multiple positionings of food and children politically? The activist network taught food materialities as contextual and systemic, involving visceral contact with food items and cognitive learning about food systems, safety and health. Classroom sessions constituted amalgams of images, imaginings, narratives, and tactilities, glued together by the intimate group setting and atmosphere of excitement. This recalls Bennett’s conceptualisation of ‘vibrant matter’ as ‘conative bodies’, from whose mutually “confederate agency” new sympathies between bodies might arise (Bennett, 2010). Bennett locates political action in the emergence of publics, “groups of bodies with the capacity to affect and be affected”, whose experience/articulation of shared harms prompts engagement in “new acts that will restore their power”, albeit with unpredictable consequences (2010:101). Similarly, volunteers sorting food in charitable spaces expressed affective and discursive re-learnings of food with potential consequences both for eventual eaters and their own foodscapes. Politics viewed thus is immanent in the micro-encounter of intimate person-food relating as well as systemic knowledge and policy change. Crafting close encounters for children and food lends space for a processual, more distributed kind of ethics than the charitable ethic of giving/receiving based on a narrow conceptualisation of 'need', recalling a Foucauldian distinction between ethics and morality (Foucault, 1997).

While inferring potential for 'vibrant encounters' to transform children’s intimate relationships with food, different children may not experience the same ‘participatory’ space in the same way (Kraftl, 2013:15). Activist-educators tended to problematise children’s/families food choices and behaviours as sites for transformation, hoping that this might galvanise future activism towards eliminating food waste. Meanwhile, however, structural limitations upon foodscapes persist: neighbourhood deprivation, food access and immigration status among others. Families' capacities to join/form 'groups of bodies' united against the 'shared harms' of wasted food and hunger require, first and foremost, their acquiring adequate food and other resources to metabolise social reproduction. Bennett's theorisation of the political promise of more-than-



human confederacies challenges the instrumentalising of matter (including food) that “feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (2010:ix). This injects ecological hope into efforts to nurture more vibrant person-food relationships through food redistribution. However, it obscures humans' different propensities for hubris, where such 'fantasies of...consumption' may emerge from experiencing prolonged deprivation. PEB's attention to political-economic structures is here recalled, in recognition of the ever-urgent task of countering welfare retrenchment and systemic inequality. The distinctive political ontology of Bennett and others' materialism is hard to reconcile with a Marxist critique. However, embracing both, we can see wasted food redistribution as meeting bodily needs *and* potentially instigating political action at unexpected sites, shedding light on diverse forms of uneven urban development whose transformation might prevent growing reliance on food charity and projects dependent on unsustainable supplies of surplus food.

### Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that activist-educators *and* charity redistributors drew upon both visceral and regulatory techniques for distinguishing food from waste. Haptic, gustatory, olfactory, visual and even auditory engagements with food allowed both activist and charity volunteers to separate food from the beyond-the-pale in an effort to redistribute ‘good’ food. Wasted food’s journey is mediated by complexes of bodies, infrastructures, regulations, practices and discourses that escape the activist/charity binary. The PEB framework acknowledges structural, discursive and material factors not as separate but interacting. Expiry-dates are determined by law and corporate production processes, but learners and educators’ knowledge and attitudes towards their relevance vary for diverse reasons. Sensual engagement with food may accompany attention to expiry-dates, while embodied practices of cutting, cooking and storing food interact with such cognitive attention and regulatory rendering of responsibility for food management.

We have presented tensions between ethical possibilities opened up by close engagement with wasted foods and the risks of prioritising individual food choices as a means to address hunger/waste. While activists sought to redefine ex-commodified food as vibrant matter through which to kindle new, potentially-transgressive kinds of



651 food-body knowing, the charity's purpose in handling food was not only based on  
 652 engagement with recipients but also to maintain donor compliance and justify a  
 653 reputation as providing adequate food. On the other hand, the diverse organisations  
 654 receiving the charity's food could be using it for radical community work, from  
 655 feeding unmet needs for food to fostering networks of solidarity at different  
 656 'community' scales including national and global campaigns.

657 Food not only *is* connection, but *does* connecting, and both activist and charitable  
 658 redistribution makes such connections possible. However, the charity's public-facing  
 659 emphasis on growing quantities redistributed or people fed suggests its lack of  
 660 engagement with food's resonant qualities and affordances for critiquing/transforming  
 661 food systems. The school programme, while it risks being perceived as another form  
 662 of charitable food assistance, created collective spaces for reflecting upon food and its  
 663 systemic transformations and possibilities. Food waste pedagogies could potentially  
 664 go beyond de-fetishising food, towards interrogating human fascinations with food  
 665 commodities and their consumption (Bennett, 2001) and recognising 'reflexive  
 666 consciousness' of the ethical food consumer as a classed modality (Guthman, 2003).  
 667 Ultimately, wasted food redistribution reflects and responds to deep economic  
 668 imbalances. Redistribution actors' knowledge of injustices affecting the communities  
 669 they feed constitutes vital grounds for redistribution practices that nourish minded-  
 670 bodies, public critique and, through reflexive alliance-building, transform food  
 671 (re)distribution structures.

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